

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00864 161351Z
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV MOPS LE SY IS
SUBJ: CAMILLE AND DANY CHAMOUN ON THE CURRENT SITUATION IN
LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: CAMILLE CHAMOUN SAYS HE IS DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON, BUT THAT HE WANTS TO COOPERATE AND HAS SOUGHT BY ALL MEANS POSSIBLE TO HELP FIND A FAIR SOLUTION TO THE FAYYADIYAH INCIDENTS. HE REFLECTS THE BASIC MARONITE PARANOIA, ALLEGING THAT JUST ABOUT EVERYONE IS AN ENEMY OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS, AND EVEN THE UNITED STATES HAS BECOME "INDIFFERENT."
END SUMMARY.

2. I HAD CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND HIS SON DANY TO LUNCH AT YARZE FEBRUARY 15, TOGETHER WITH POLITICAL OFFICER MOLINEAUX. CHAMOUNS SAID THAT THE SITUATION THAT DAY WAS GENERALLY QUIET, BUT THAT CONSIDERABLE TENSIONS STILL PREVAILED IN THE CITY. (AS I RODE UP TO YARZE FROM THE EMBASSY, I HAD BEEN STRUCK BY THE VERY LIGHT TRAFFIC.) DURING LUNCH, DANY WAS CALLED BY HIS MILITIA PEOPLE, WHO TOLD HIM THAT A YOUNG GIRL IN AYN AR-RUMANNAH HAD JUST BEEN SHOT DEAD BY A SNIPER, PRESUMABLY IN SHI'A, WHOM DANY ASSUMED TO BE SYRIAN.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00864 161351Z

3. SUSPICIOUS OF THE SYRIANS. THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION, CAMILLE CHAMOUN CAME AROUND SEVERAL TIMES TO THE QUESTION OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON. THE SYRIANS, HE SAID, CONTINUALLY PROTESTED THAT THEIR ONLY INTEREST IN LEBANON WAS TO RESTORE PEACE SO THAT THEY COULD GO HOME, HOWEVER, THEY WERE MEDDLING IN LEBANESE POLITICS. THEY MIGHT HAVE DELIBERATELY PROVOKED INCIDENTS, WHICH EVENTUALLY LED TO THE FAYYADIYAH EPISODE, IN ORDER TO HAVE

A PRETEXT TO STRENGTHEN THEIR OWN HAND IN LEBANON. I TOLD HIM THAT WE BELIEVED THE FAYYADIYAH EPISODE WAS A SPONTANEOUS EVENT, NOT PLANNED BY ANYONE. WHILE HIMSELF SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS, CHAMOUN ALSO EVINced SOME COMPREHENSION OF EQUAL AND OPPOSITE SYRIAN FEARS. HE RECOUNTED THAT SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM OVER THE WEEKEND HAD TOLD HIM THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD SUSPECTED ORIGIN OF FAYYADIYAH INCIDENT WAS AN ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN PLOT, WITH COVERT AMERICAN BACKING, TO CREATE TROUBLES IN LEBANON IN ORDER TO WEAKEN THE SYRIAN GENERAL POSITION.

4. POST-FAYYADIYAH ARRANGEMENTS. WITH SOME PRIDE, CAMILLE CHAMOUN SAID THAT THE SYRIANS HAD BEEN OPPOSED TO A PROVISION IN THE SPECIAL BILL PASSED BY THE PARLIAMENT ESTABLISHING A JOINT ADF-LEBANESE MILITARY TRIBUNAL PROVIDING FOR LEGAL COUNSEL FOR DEFENDANTS. HE SAID THAT EARLY FEBRUARY 14 HE HAD HIMSELF RAISED THIS ISSUE WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS, SAYING THAT HE WOULD NOT SUPPORT THE BILL IN PARLIAMENT IF IT WERE NOT AMENDED TO PROVIDE FOR LEGAL COUNSEL. SPEAKING TO THE PARLIAMENT, HE HAD SAID THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AS ESPOUSED BY AMERICAN PRESIDENT CARTER, REQUIRED COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE. THE PARLIAMENT HAD BEEN PERSUADED BY THIS ARGUMENT AND HAD THEREFORE AMENDED THE BILL ACCORDINGLY.

5. SYRIAN SUSPICIONS OF CAMILLE CHAMOUN. THE CHAMOUNS DESCRIBED HOW THE SYRIAN ATTACK BY FIRE AGAINST NLP HEADQUARTERS ON FEBRUARY 8 APPEARED TO BE DIRECTED AGAINST CAMILLE CHAMOUN HIMSELF. SYRIAN
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00864 161351Z

RIFLEMEN HAD FIRED DIRECTLY AT THE WINDOWS OF THE FORMER PRESIDENT'S OWN OFFICE, NOT MUCH ELSEWHERE IN THE BUILDING. THIS HAD HAPPENED WHILE HE WAS ON THE TELEPHONE TALKING TO SYRIAN MILITARY LEADERS, SO SYRIANS KNEW EXACTLY WHERE HE WAS. LATER, THE SYRIANS HAD FIRED THREE ROCKETS AT A BUILDING ADJACENT TO HIS RESIDENCE. THEY HAD SPOTTED WRONG BUILDING. HE LEFT CLEAR IMPLICATION THAT HE THOUGHT SYRIANS WERE OUT TO GET HIM PERSONALLY.

6. IN RESPONSE TO A SUGGESTION THAT THE SYRIANS PERCEIVE CAMILLE AS LEADER OF THE LEBANESE FRONT, INCLUDING DISPARATE ELEMENTS, SOME OF WHICH HAD DELIBERATELY PROVOKED THE SYRIANS, THE CHAMOUNS RESPONDED THAT THEY HAD ACHIEVED GREAT THINGS IN KEEPING THE VARIOUS CHRISTIAN MILITIA ELEMENTS UNDER CONTROL, DESPITE SYRIAN PROVOCATIONS. DANY SAID THAT, FOR EXAMPLE, IN AYN AR-RUMANNAH--ONE OF THE MOST TENSE AREAS DURING THE WEEK--THERE WERE 6,000 WEAPONS BUT ONLY 1500 IN THE HANDS OF NLP MILITIA ELEMENTS. DANY SEEMED TO BLAME UNCONTROLLED MILITIA ELEMENTS IN ANY AR-RUMANNAH FOR THE AMBUSH OF TWO SYRIAN TRUCKS AND KILLING OF 30 SYRIAN SOLDIERS IN THEM ON FEBRUARY 8 OR 9. (PREVIOUSLY, SPEAKING TO EMBOFF, DANY HAD SAID HE SUSPECTED THAT THE AMBUSH HAD BEEN THE WORK OF PHALANGE COMMANDO CELLS.)

7. COMMENT: THE CHAMOUNS, FATHER AND SON, APPARENTLY HAVE PLAYED A FAIRLY REASONABLE ROLE IN THE COURSE OF THE EVENTS OF THE LAST WEEK. BUT IT IS STILL ALL POLITICS: CAMILLE CHAMOUN SCORED SOME POINTS WITH HIS DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCY IN MAKING AN ISSUE OF THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF DEFENDANTS IN THE JOINT ADF-LEBANESE MILITARY COURT. WHILE PROFESSING A WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH THE SYRIANS, HE CLEARLY IS TAKING A POSITION AT THE SAME TIME FUNDAMENTALLY SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS, AND PLAYING A ROLE IN MOBILIZING MARONITE OPINION AGAINST THE SYRIANS. THE PREDICAMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON IN THE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES SCARCELY CAME UP IN THE CONVERSATION, PERHAPS BECAUSE HE DID NOT HAVE IT IN MIND; AFTER ALL, IT IS NOT HIS GOVERNMENT.
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